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Smith liked Anonymity

by Chris Baker

Smith liked anonymity. He was fortunate that was his surname. James Smith, or Jim as a few knew him. He preferred that even that was not known. Often it had occurred to him that there must be many other Jim Smiths, how many he did not know: they might have preferred a less ordinary name. Not he, he enjoyed the fact that he was, in that respect one of many, totally indistinguishable: like a sheep in a flock, a bullock in a herd: not deserving of the least attention. At present, he preferred to be known simply as *'the bloke in the bunk at the end'*. He'd chosen it deliberately: it was at the end of the hut, out of the way of the others.

Lying on his bunk, he stared at the springs of the bunk above and tried to empty his mind but could not. For the umpteenth time he thought that over the years, the springs must have carried some weight, as now they were so loose the mattress sagged, as if the bunk above were a hammock. Had it had an occupant, certainly one of any size, occupation of his bunk would have been difficult. He imagined momentarily the springs squealing at the least movement. No one else in the hut had made any attempt to take that bunk. He was pleased about that: he congratulated himself on choosing his own so well.

It was not that he did not like those in the hut, or that he did not have anything in common with them. They had to perform tasks together, tasks that required cooperation. He did a bit more than was asked of him but only to avoid attention. Lack of effort or co-ordination would have brought him to the attention of his hut and those training them. He knew to avoid that. He'd even wondered whether he should smoke but decided not to when he saw non-smokers outnumbered smokers. Besides, the proximity of the mattress above would have been an unnecessary fire risk.